

Message Text

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PAGE 01 COLOMB 01316 240948Z
ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 INR-10 NSAE-00
PA-02 USIA-15 SP-02 NSC-05 /045 W
-----117509 241008Z /15

R 220940Z MAR 78
FM AMEMBASSY COLOMBO
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 9855
INFO AMEMBASSY DACCA
AMEMBASSY ISLAXABAD
AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU
AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI

UNCLAS COLOMBO 1316

E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: PINT,CE
SUBJECT: SRI LANKA: GOVERNMENT PARTY WINS COLOMBO WEST BY-ELECTIONS

1. RESULTS OF BY-ELECTION IN COLOMBO WEST FOR NATIONAL STATE ASSEMBLY (NSA) SEAT VACATED BY J.R. JAYEWARDENE WHEN HE BECAME PRESIDENT WERE AS EXPECTED-THE UNITED NATIONAL PARTY (UNP) CANDIDATE PICKED BY JAYEWARDENE, ANURA BASTIAN, WON EASILY. THE VOTER TURNOUT WAS 58.39 PERCENT COMPARED TO 72.42 PERCENT IN 1977. MAKE UP OF NSA IS NOW UNP 141, SRI LANKA FREEDOM PARTY (SLFP) 9, TAMIL UNITED LIBERATION FRONT (TULF) 17, CEYLON WORKERS CONGRESS (CWC) 1.

2. LOCAL POLITICAL OBSERVERS WERE LOOKING TO ELECTION RESULTS FOR ANY SIGNS OF VOTER DISENCHANTMENT WITH GOVERNMENT PERFORMANCE TO DATE. THE UNP WON WITH A REDUCED MAJORITY, 13,176 VERSUS 21,707 IN 1977, BUT THIS SUGGESTS LITTLE LOSS OF SUPPORT FOR THE GOVERNMENT. A STRONG UNP MEMBER RAN AS AN INDEPENDENT AND SIPHONED OFF 11.25 PERCENT OF THE VOTE. THE SLFP HAD A SLIGHTLY LOWER PERCENTAGE OF THE VOTE THAN IT DID IN 1977, WHILE THE LANKA SAMAJA SAMAJA PARTY (LSSP), MOSTLY ON THE
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PERSONAL MAGNETISM OF BERNARD SOYSA, WENT UP FROM 6.55 PERCENT IN 1977 TO 13.61 PERCENT IN THIS ELECTION.

3. COLOMBO WEST IS NOT AN ACCURATE GAUGE OF COUNTRY WIDE SENTIMENT. IT IS A TRADITIONAL UNP SEAT. IT IS AN URBAN ELECTORATE OF MOSTLY LOWER TO UPPER MIDDLE CLASS VOTERS WHO ARE INCOME TAX PAYERS. AS SUCH, THEY

WERE NOT AFFECTED BY THE REMOVAL OF THE RICE AND SUGAR RATIONS AND ARE IN A BETTER POSITON TO ABSORB RECENT INCREASES IN THE COST OF LIVING THEN LOWER INCOME GROUPS. THERE IS ALSO A LARGE TAMIL COMMUNITY THAT TRADITIOANLLY VOTES WITH THE UNP. HOWEVER,SOME OF THE TAMILS MAY HAVE MOVED OR SENT FAMILY MEMBERS TO JAFFNA DURING THE COMMUNAL DISTRUBANCES LAST YEAR, WHICH COULD ACCOUNT FOR THE LOWER VOTER TURNOVER.
WRIGGINS

NOTE BY OC/TC TELEGRAM DELAYED IN TRANSMISSION.

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